

Oil and the Challenges of the Niger Delta Development: Towards a New Outlook for Peacebuilding, Security and Development

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Mineral resources constitute the natural wealth of a nation and Nigeria is highly endowed in strategic resources to which oil is one of them. The exploitation of the resources to enhance the course of modernization is the means by which all nations and people of all races measure and relate the value and contribution of their natural resource, to the quality of life. The exploitation of the natural resources to nurture the well-being and development of any nation has both positive and negative externalities and thus, every nation takes measures to optimize the benefits from resource exploitation and minimize the many serious negative externalities associated with mineral resource extraction, particularly the incidence of environmental damage, pollution and ecological degradation. The Exploitation of oil and gas and the heavy industrial expansion to otherwise pristine environment threatens the security and the survival of the indigenous people and the biodiversity of the natural habitat, on which they depend. The exploitation results in environmental damage that threatens the ecological security and the survivability of the region's fragile mangrove ecosystem. The Niger Delta harbors most of the Nigerian oil industry operations.

International Oil companies mostly from Europe, America and Asia in partnership with the producer government of Nigeria have not taken adequate measures for environmental protection and stewardship to ensure and sustain the biodiversity and ecological security of the people and their land. This feature in oil industry operation is the real challenge for the attainment of sustainable development in the oil rich Niger Delta. The Niger Delta like other Deltas is a fragile domain of wetlands. The advent of the oil culture with its cash economy has destroyed the traditional value of the communities to such an extent that traditional norms no longer hold the communities together. Where there was peace between the communities, the advent of the oil created competition, rivalry and destruction of lives and property. The estimated population of the region is about 25 million.

Nigeria's Niger Delta is bountifully endowed with oil and gas. Today, the area remains the hot bed of the oil industry's operations, which have had disruptive effects on the indigenous forms of Bio-resources management due to the dislocation of the ecosystem, environmental degradation, soil contamination and oil spillages which are characteristics of oil exploration and exploitation. The occurrences of these impacts and its negative externalities have been a major source of conflict between the oil communities and the oil companies for over fifty years. The existence of the observable political, economic and environmental anomalies and the quest for development that benefits the people remains a challenge. Therefore this paper calls for a new outlook for the promotion of sustainable development in partnership with the people of the area to ensure peace, security and realistic development for the oil region. It is in this light that we need to take another initiative or alternative outlook for peace building in the Niger Delta to promote harmony in development.